



## WILLIAMSTOWN FIRE DISTRICT

34 Water Street, Williamstown Ma 01267 | [www.williamstownfiredept.org](http://www.williamstownfiredept.org)

# FAQ

(Updated 2/18/2023)

## A Once in a Lifetime Chance to Build a Modern Fire Station for Williamstown

The current station was built 73 years ago! Few of us were around then and few will be around if/when the proposed building needs replacing.

Since 1950 the Fire District has taken on more responsibilities, the trucks have grown bigger, and safety requirements for stations have greatly expanded.

Videos and slide presentations that show the many ways in which the current station is greatly deficient can be viewed [here](#).

This, finally, is Williamstown's chance to build for the long future a safe, operational, and net carbon-zero facility for our neighbors who volunteer to keep all of us and our property safe.

A plan for a new station was proposed in 2013. It didn't pass, however, because enough voters expressed concern that building it might reduce funds available for the anticipated new facility for Mt. Greylock Regional School. That project has now been completed. So has the project for a new police station.

### ***What are the district's responsibilities?***

In addition to responding to structure, vehicle, forest, brush, and other fires, the department's responsibilities include handling hazardous material leaks and spills, providing EMS support for vehicle accidents and other outdoor and home medical emergencies, providing lift assistance to those who've fallen, extricating victims of vehicle and operating equipment accidents, performing search and rescue for lost or injured people (in woods and water and on ice), assisting residents with carbon monoxide issues and flooded basements, and responding to severe weather events.

Such climate-related emergencies are expected to become more frequent and intense.

The district also has extensive responsibilities for permitting and code inspections for all types of structures and operations. It also carries out a vigorous program of fire prevention education in schools and with the general public, especially the elderly.

### ***How would the proposed facility meet the project goals?***

1) It would meet safety codes established by the National Fire Protection Association. These include the elimination of trips, and other hazards and the provision of facilities to decontaminate firefighter gear and clothing. Currently our firefighters, returning from a call, have to hose themselves and each other down in the station driveway. This falls way short of best practice.

2) Operationally the new station would, among other things, provide the space needed to service vehicles inside, and the room needed to do much more training on site. Volunteer firefighters need to complete more than 300 hours of training to become Firefighter I/II certified, and need to continue training to maintain it. Much of this training occurs at firefighter academies in both Springfield and Stow Mass. The more that training can take place on site, the less of a disincentive it is to become and remain a volunteer firefighter. Also the more convenient the training facilities are the more district members will train, and the more they train, the safer they'll be and the safer we'll be when they respond to an alarm at our home or workplace, or to our motor vehicle accident.

3) This will be the first municipal building project since Williamstown's Annual Town Meeting endorsed the goal of becoming a carbon-neutral community. The proposed station is designed to achieve net carbon-zero certification from the International Future Living Institute. Except for a mandated emergency backup system, all power will be produced by solar panels on site.

### ***Where would this be?***

At 560 Main Street—the property just east of the Aubuchon store. (The material you see there now is for the nearby bridge project.)

### ***How big would it be and what would it cost?***

At its meeting this January 25, The Prudential Committee set a total cost ceiling of \$22.5 million, and said that in ongoing design stages it would work to lower that

further. The original design comprised 28,000 square feet. It's now projected to be around 22,000.

On the District website are floor plans for the 27,000-square-foot version and a description of the purpose of each space.

Databases available on the Fire District site suggest that the size and cost per square foot are generally in line with facilities built in the region in recent years. And those calculations were made before the January 25 reductions.

### ***How would it be paid for?***

As with any significant municipal capital project, the bulk of the cost will be borrowed. In this case we anticipate two consecutive one-year notes followed by one 25-year bond. Annual repayments on the notes and the bond would be added to the District's yearly property tax assessment.

The effect on the property tax rate of the first one-year note is projected to be around \$.30 per \$1,000 of property valuation, and for the second one-year note about \$.50 per \$1,000 of valuation.

That means that a property valued at \$200,000 would face an added assessment in each of the first two years of \$60.00 to \$100.00. On one valued at \$400,000, it would be \$120.00 to \$200.00.

(The median assessment for a single-unit home in town is \$358,600.)

The effect on the tax rate of the subsequent 25-year bond is projected to average a little less than \$1.00 per \$1,000 of property valuation.

The combined tax rate for the Town of Williamstown and the Williamstown Fire District is currently \$16.78 (\$16.17 for the Town, \$.61 for the District) so an increase of \$1.00 would be 5.9 percent.

These calculations were made after Williams College pledged to contribute \$5 million toward the project but before the Select Board voted unanimously to put toward the project \$225,000 of American Rescue Plan Act money. That Select Board decision will lower these figures a bit further. Meanwhile, the District continues to vigorously pursue state, federal, and private gifts and grants, which would lower these calculations further still. The figures would also be lowered by any further reductions in construction costs, which the Prudential Committee has committed to looking for in the ongoing design process.

A fuller presentation of this material, including graphs, is available [here](#).

### ***When's the last time that the Fire District borrowed for a capital project?***

The Fire District has never before borrowed for a capital project.

### ***Who decides whether the project goes forward?***

The District's governing Prudential Committee and its Building Committee began developing plans for the new station in 2021. Since the summer of 2022, those plans have been shared in open forums, WilliNet videos, meetings with local groups, public drop-in sessions, direct mail to all households, news media, and social media.

The plan now goes to a District-wide special meeting open to all registered voters in Williamstown. It's scheduled for Tuesday, February 28, at 7:00 p.m. at Williamstown Elementary School.

Free, organized activities for children ages six and up will be provided next door at the Williamstown Youth Center. Anyone needing a free ride to and from the meeting can contact **wfdbuildinginfo@williamstownfiredept.org**.

Because the project would require bond financing, its passage will require a two-thirds majority of those voting that evening. Law does not allow for early or absentee voting.

The wording of the warrant article is at the end of this document.

### ***When might it be built?***

If the project is approved on February 28, site work could begin this calendar year. Construction would begin in the Spring of 2024 and be expected to last about 14 months.

### ***How environmentally conscious will the building be?***

The building is designed to obtain net carbon-zero certification from the International Future Living Institute. This requires using only renewable sources of energy and accounting for the carbon embedded in the building materials. The upfront cost of this is around \$1.4 million. And the breakeven point on the solar panels is six and a half years, and the initial costs are much more than made up for in grants, incentives, and foregone electricity costs.

The flood lines in our region were drawn almost 40 years ago and the trend since then, and projected forward, is for storms that are more frequent and intense. Regulations mandate not building in what's currently considered the 100-year floodplain, but the plan calls for using fill to raise the bottom of the building to what is the current 500-year

flood line.

### ***Has the district considered regionalizing with, say, North Adams?***

To inform the building design project, the district commissioned a study by Municipal Resources, Inc., of the district's current operations and how they could be expected to change in the coming decades. When the idea of possible regionalization arose, the firm strongly discouraged pursuing it.

They knew of almost no regionalizations later considered to be successful and pointed out that

- There would be the complication of the two services being different kinds of legal entities (North Adams a municipal service, Williamstown separate from its municipality).
- They operate on different models (North Adams on a full-time one, Williamstown on a call/volunteer one).
- With regionalization there'd still be the need for a substantial facility in Williamstown.
- Any personal savings would be minimal because we'd still need at least one full-time staff person in Williamstown, which is the number of full-time employees we have now.

The financial difference between a professional and volunteer force is considerable. North Adams's annual operating budget is a little over \$2 million, Williamstown is around \$500,000. Taking all reasonable steps to make volunteering attractive can have significant financial benefits for Williamstown.

### ***What would happen to the current station building?***

Once the District moved out, the property would be put up for sale.

### ***Who serves on the Building Committee?***

Elaine Neely (Chair), Don Dubendorf, Ryan Housman, Jim Kolesar, Bob Menicocci (*ex officio*), Dave Moresi, and Mike Noyes, Chief Craig Pedercini

### ***Who serves on the Prudential Committee***

Dave Moresi (Chair), Joe Beverly, Lindsay Neathawk, John Notsley, and Alex Steele

**Wording of the warrant article to be voted on:**

**Article 1:** To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, and/or borrow the sum of Twenty Two Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$22,500,000.00) for the design, engineering, construction and equipping of a new fire station to be located at 562-580 Main Street, including site preparation, remediation, and demolition costs, and all costs incidental and related thereto; and to authorize the District Treasurer, with the approval of the Prudential Committee, to issue any bonds or notes that may be necessary for that purpose, as authorized by the provisions of G.L. c. 44, or any other enabling authority; and further, to authorize the Prudential Committee to apply for and accept any forms of financial assistance that may be available to the District on account of this project which amount received shall reduce the amount to be borrowed pursuant to this vote by a like amount; and further, to authorize the Prudential Committee to enter into all agreements and execute any and all instruments deemed necessary to effectuate the purposes of this article; or take any action in relation thereto.  
(two-thirds vote required to borrow funds)